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INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9470  
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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4415  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3217  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0016  
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RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0391  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2387  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6926  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4768  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001617

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/03/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: INDEPENDENT PRESS HIGHLIGHTS EMERGING  
KARUNA FORCE

REF: A. COLOMBO 1541

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1051

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 508

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake for reasons 1.4(b,d).

"A Wounded Tiger is a Dangerous Tiger"

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Two independent English weekly newspapers highlighted stories about the eastern LTTE-breakaway Karuna Faction on October 1. The Sunday Times published an interview with Vinayagamoorthy Muralitharan, also known as Karuna Amman, who predicted that his former confidant, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, would attack soft targets in Colombo having lost more conventional military battles with Sri Lankan forces since June. The Sunday Times also reproduced a photograph the independent media published recently of what they report to be as many as 500 new Karuna cadres "graduating" from military training in eastern Sri Lanka. The Sunday Leader headlined that a Karuna cadre had confessed to a string of kidnappings in Colombo. End Summary.

"Renegade LTTE Leader Warns Against Complacency"

[1](#)2. (C) Independent Sunday Times defense columnist Iqbal Athas turned his attention in his October 1 column to the LTTE-breakaway Karuna faction, including an interview with V. Muralitharan, a.k.a. Karuna. (Note: Karuna broke away from the "Vanni" LTTE in March 2003, taking with him at least 200 cadres. The LTTE and Karuna have been engaging each other in small-scale attacks in the east since then (ref C).) Athas argued that Karuna, who has strengthened his armed group and formed a political party - the Tamil Makkal Vidutalai Pulikal (TMVP, or Tamil People's Liberation Tigers - ref C) - has become an increasingly major player in the political-military landscape of Sri Lanka.

[1](#)3. (C) Noting in the same article that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Ministry of Defense now requires journalists to clear all defense-related stories through the ministry, Athas did not imply that the Karuna faction enjoys the covert

support of the GSL, as several of our interlocutors from civil society have alleged (ref B). The Sunday Times published a photograph of Karuna cadres "graduating" from military training, reportedly at a camp near Batticaloa.

¶4. (C) In response to the GSL's recent military victories against the LTTE, Karuna reportedly told Athas: "The LTTE cannot be treated as a spent force. The LTTE can regroup itself and engage in unconventional warfare. Having faced serious political and military setbacks, the LTTE will find ways to sustain its presence by engaging in terrorist activities."

"Confession by Karuna Cadre on Abductions in Colombo"

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¶5. (C) The independent Sunday Leader, known for its anti-Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) government investigative journalism, headlined an expose of an alleged Karuna cadre's confession to a series of abductions in Colombo. The "exclusive" article reported that police in a Colombo suburb arrested a 26-year-old Tamil from the eastern Karuna-heavy district of Batticaloa on September 29. The suspect confessed to being a Karuna cadre when he came to collect the \$250,000 ransom for abducted Tamil businessman Sathasivam Kumaraswamy.

¶6. (C) The independent Human Rights Commission (HRC) of Sri Lanka decried in a September report that at least 25 Tamils have been abducted in Colombo since June (ref A). Several of our civil interlocutors have implicated the Karunas, possibly working with military intelligence, in this ring of abductions. Associated Press journalist Gemunu Amarasinghe

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(PROTECT) told poloff on October 1 that his research indicates that the Karuna faction is funding its military strengthening through a kidnapping scheme. Western People's Front member of parliament Mano Ganesham mirrored the former's argument to poloff on October 3: "The Karuna group is carrying out abductions from two locations in Colombo to raise funds to strengthen the organization." HRC Chairman Justice Ramanathan told noted to poloff on October 3: "There seems to be a third force. Witnesses are frightened because they've received death threats. Without witnesses, we cannot precede in our investigations (into the abductions)." Berghof Foundation Director Mario Gomez told pol FSN on September 20: "Whether or not the Karuna group is involved, the issue is a larger scene of impunity."

Comment

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¶7. (C) Karuna's willingness to speak with the Sunday Times, as well as the allegation that his cadres are running an extortion racket in Colombo, indicate that his faction is a growing force on Sri Lanka's political and military front. Many of our interlocutors, from Tamil intellectuals to foreign correspondents, have speculated that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) security forces are actively working with the brutal Karunas in order to undermine the LTTE. We will report in depth on the Karuna faction in the coming weeks.

BLAKE